

FOOD SECURITY HAITI: CRITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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Peasant Food and Social Stability

Executive Summary

The world food economy attends to a goal of **economic production not human reproduction**. In doing so it heightens peasant food insecurity and social instability by undermining peasant market advantages and their right to production as it aims for global comparative advantage. This occurs through reduced tariff and market protections allowing importation of cheap food products. Peasants respond by finding specialized niche food markets not already subsumed by imports. These value added projects, however, are not simply about food. The projects are about recreating the Haitian peasant way of being as the *poto mitan* or center pole of the Haitian food system. This includes reproducing the peasant moral economy of community care, identity and autonomy as food producers, distributors and consumers.

How the World Food Economy Creates Food Insecurity in Haiti

Rules favouring trade liberalization have integrated Haiti's internal food economy into the global food system. Proponents claimed the availability of cheaper imported food improves food security and allows farmers to transition to agro-export production and urban assembly labor increasing incomes and Haiti's foreign currency. The transition has resulted in social instability and increased food insecurity as Haitians become dependent on unaffordable, volatile global food

stocks,¹ and communal lands are repurposed for agro-exportation. The problem occurs when a world food economy views food production as only a supply-centric economic endeavor and misses the social importance of food to the lives peasants as individuals and in community building. This

- * Despite improving food security worldwide, Haiti is more food insecure
- * The world food economy relies on peasants to forgo production to become consumers, without offering adequate replacement employment
- * Peasants challenge their marginalization within Haiti's internal food economy by reproducing themselves as Haiti's *poto mitan* or center pole of the internal food economy

occurs because large-scale development misses the peasant's role as the *poto mitan* of the internal food economy. Community-based organizations (CBOs) respond to this marginalization by building value-added economic projects that follow the peasant epistemology and ontology.

Approach and Results

Results were determined using feminist methodologies, grounded theory, and mixed-methods to contrast and compare project frameworks from four community-based organizations in northern Haiti. This research found peasants build niche food projects within

¹ Cohen, M. J. (2013). *Diri Nasyon ou Diri Miami? Food,*

CBOs and use the activities to strengthen one's sense of personhood through the constitutive parts of the *poto mitan* – moral economy of community care, identity and autonomy.

This research found the framework increased critical and strategic contributions to the local, regional and national food security despite protracted lack of investment by the Government of Haiti. Further, they made contributions using communal state lands. In contrast the government's Centre for the Facilitation of Investment (CFI 2015) states the communal state land is void of activity and available for foreign investment. This study allows for a new understanding of how local communities improve food security. The framework has scalable potential

“The relative neglect of agriculture and rural development by most Haitian administrations over the past 40 years, coupled with the international donor community's general underinvestment in this area in the last 25 years, has contributed to the sector's steady decline” (Shamsie 2012:133).

Source: Shamsie, Y. (2012). Haiti's post-earthquake transformation: What of agriculture and rural development? *Latin American Politics and Society*, 54(2), 133–152.

to NGO project designs and communal, regional and national government levels.

Conclusion

It was found that peasants are actively producing Haiti's internal food economy, food security and social stability. When provided with land and technical assistance they are able to increase their contribution and are better suited to meet the local contextual needs and variations. Supporting the peasant production approach creates sustainable solutions because it is grounded within the peasant epistemology and ontology designed to reduce vulnerability and improve the strength and safety of social networks. This is achieved by reproducing

personhood through the social construct of the *poto mitan*. It increases one's ability to produce, distribute, and consume food properly. This approach sits in opposition to large-scale land grabs that remove land and water resources in a production model geared to benefit shareholders

“Peasant organizations use frameworks that reproduce peasant epistemologies and ontologies to make strategic and critical contributions to food security and social stability.”

and government coffers – **a goal of economic production not human reproduction**. The local approach also sits in opposition to a world food economy that tries to meet immediate consumption needs, through supply-centric models that neglect the social aspects of food production.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To achieve sustainable outcomes peasants must enact locally designed and appropriate food economies that include and enhance culturally important social roles. This study offers evidence to support participatory decentralization as mandated by the Haitian constitution to ensure that land repurposing is left in control of local decision makers that represent the interests of peasants. This would allow for governance to start at the grassroots level and maintain opportunities for reproduction of food security and social stability.

For further details see:

Vansteenkiste, J. (2017). Haiti's peasantry as Poto Mitán: refocusing the foundations of prosperity and development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2017.1304365